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travelers, dressed in their brightest, newest garments, were speeded on their way. The friends and relatives loaded them with money and presents of clothing, food, and wool, which the pilgrims were to donate to the great and holy monastery. The whole ceremony of leave-taking was made a part of the bright landscape by the flowers everywhere—on the dress of the pilgrims, fastened to the gifts, and carried in huge bunches. Upon their return a few days later the dusty pilgrims were met at the outskirts of the village and escorted home through the blue twilight by those eager to hear of every adventure during the days and nights in the great mountains, whose jagged walls have protected Rila Monastery for hundreds of years.

Formal piety, as shown in pilgrimages, was only one of the major characteristics which these Bulgarian villagers possessed. The Dragalevtsy people, especially the men, were predominantly literate. Bulgaria, despite what seems a forbidding Cyrillic alphabet, has the highest rate of literacy of all Balkan countries, a fact which can be attributed to the tendency to regard education as a panacea for individual and social ills. While only 44 per cent of the women over fifteen years of age could read and write, 92 per cent of the men were literate. Of course, I often came upon groups of peasants crowded around a friend slowly spelling out a newspaper article aloud, but these little clusters of attentive listeners originated because of the scarcity of newspaper subscribers, not necessarily because of illiteracy.

The Dragalevtsy people were also law-abiding. During the first three years I knew the village, and informants said that the record went much farther back than that, no Dragalevtsy peasant had been taken to Sofia for imprisonment. There was no local jail, nor any need for one. This was not a sign of the inefficiency of local police, but rather an indication of the peaceable and honest traits of the people.

In many other characteristics the villagers shared what have come to be known as the universal "rural virtues," for theirs was an agrarian way of life. More than three-fourths of the family heads were peasant proprietors. In addition to these, there were two other occupational groups: the intellectuals and the artisans. Despite their small number, the intelligentsia, as they were called by the peasants, were the most influential group in the community. Whenever the

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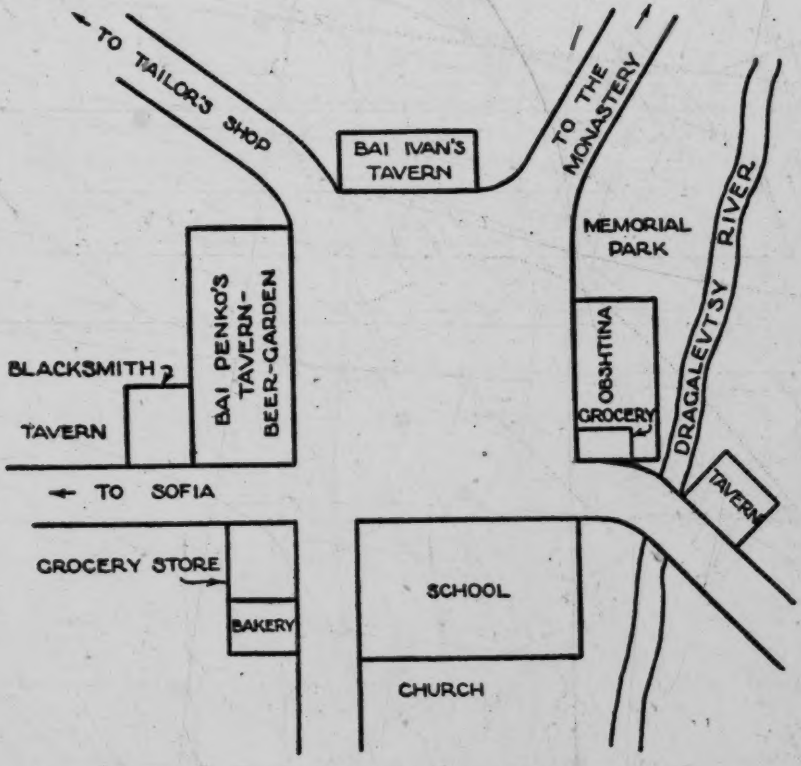

Renaissance Square, the focal point of Dragalevtsy's communal life

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weather was agreeable I was sure to find several of them playing cards in front of Bai Penko's tavern on the northern side of Renaissance Square, where the winter *horo* was held. Even though they sat engrossed in their game, they could still keep an eye on what was happening in the village, since this square was the focal point of community life. The mayor, for instance, could watch the Obshtina, or municipal building, across the square, as well as all traffic that entered this rocky plot of ground on its way to the city of Sofia below or to the monastery higher up Mount Vitosha. The priest could look past the modern school building, flanking the western side of the square, to the church just beyond. The village doctor's husband was near in

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case his wife needed him, although he invariably grumbled in his native Russian upon being called away from the game. A fourth hand during the summer was a reserve army officer whose intense love for German efficiency and ideology and whose contempt for the "ignorant, unreliable peasant" became bywords in the community. Peasants sitting on the porch of Bai Ivan's tavern on the eastern side of the square could observe with seeming indifference the intelligentsia at play, distracted though they were at times by the fervent temperance lectures delivered by the tavern keeper's daughter-in-law whenever she placed a glass of *rakiya* in front of a customer.

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These intelligentsia proved to be interesting people. The mayor had a good education, completed by the study of law in Russia. His father had been a priest in Boyana, a village just four miles to the west, so the mayor, himself a *Shop,* knew the workings of the peasant mind. When he was sent to the village as mayor back in 1934, after the *coup d'état* of that year abolished all elections and deprived many local officials of their jobs, he issued a flowery proclamation which contained such thoughts as these:

> Therefore, as I take up my duties, desiring greatly to use the small abilities that I possess for the economic and cultural uplift of the villages included in the commune entrusted to my care, I wish to express my good feelings of loyalty and friendliness and attachment to the population and to certify that I am ready to work for the uplift of our commune and to be the loyal conveyor of its economic and cultural interests and needs.
>
> Imbued with the idea that we are all members of the same family, sons of mother Bulgaria, let us forget the recent past of shameful partisan struggles and begin to live as genuine brothers—Bulgarians filled with mutual love, patience, harmony, respect, and good will.
>
> Let us do our duty to these beautifully situated villages, perched on the slope of Mount Vitosha, and make them attractive gardens, with culture, and places of merriment and songs.

The people soon learned that the mayor when excited talked so rapidly that he failed to enunciate clearly, and they always enjoyed mimicking this mannerism. They did not particularly resent his management of their affairs, despite the fact that he had been sent by the central government which gave local communes no choice in

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(secondary school) education, found no work in Sofia, and came back to farm his land. The fact that he could survey his fields, keep his accounts, and do various other things more quickly and efficiently than his unschooled neighbors, had made him a living example of the benefits of education, as far as the Dragalevtsy farmers were concerned.

I had often heard both Bulgarians and foreigners say that children in Bulgarian villages did not know how to play. Though such a statement accurately describes the past, it was certainly becoming less true because of the growing influence of the school. Nevertheless, with the exception of certain games played in the pastures, children's group games were new to the village.

The older people said that fifty years ago there were almost no games; even these few were played only by men and boys while the women and girls always carried their knitting needles or distaffs with them. "The women sang while they worked and that was their game. The lonely shepherd boy had his *kaval* [flute]." Most of the old people had absolutely no recollection of games they played when young, which probably accounted for their unfriendly attitude toward children's games. One laconic old *baba* snapped: "The children throw stones at one another for a game."

There was much difference of opinion among the adults as to just what the children did in their playtime and with whom they played. A young man told me that children played together even if the families were unfriendly, but an older woman insisted that parents completely controlled their children's choice of playmates. The simplest way of getting at the truth was to talk to the children themselves. The children were used to seeing me and were uniformly friendly, often running to meet me as I came up the lane from the meadows. I had photographed many of them and knew their parents, so it was easy to get them to talk.

One solemn little group of five girls told me they were playing, which I took to mean that they were at leisure for the moment, for they were simply sitting on the ground by the stream trickling down the village street.

"What do you play?"

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"Oh, we play 'woman's work' and talk about the cattle, school, and such things."

"Don't you ever play with dolls?" I ventured, for only one of the group was as old as thirteen. Five pairs of black eyes looked at me seriously.

"Some of us have never had dolls, and now we are much too old."

Shocked exclamations greeted my last question, when I asked if they ever quarreled.

"Never, for we are neighbors, and share our bread, and play together every day."

Borislav, Ivan, and Boris (one thirteen-year-old and two eleven-year-olds) were an entertaining triumvirate. The father of Borislav was a streetcar conductor in Sofia and often took his son to the city. On one of these trips, the boy had seen Sofia children rolling hoops. When Borislav got back to the village, he showed his cronies how to make and play with hoops. The boys said they shared food as well as toys, and helped one another with work. Ivan had to work a great deal, which curtailed their games considerably. When I asked this group if there was any fighting, the boys grinned.

"We fight with the other boys because they make fun of us when we don't know our lessons."

"What about fighting among you three?" I persisted.

"Well," said Borislav frankly, "we have to beat Ivan once in a while because when we fight for fun to see who is strongest and Ivan wins, he boasts, and then we have to fight him seriously." (Boris told me later in private that he didn't like Ivan very much, but "I take him as a friend so as not to be without any one.")

While I was sitting on the curbing near the fountain with the three boys, a tiny, six-year-old girl wandered up. I asked her if she ever played with boys. The thin little braids bobbed vigorously up and down for the Bulgarian "no," as she gave the universal reason, "My mother doesn't let me."

All the children to whom I talked agreed that it was more fun for boys and girls to play separately. (Seven-year-old Mara did play with Peter, but only, she assured me earnestly, because she had no one

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else in the neighborhood.) It was also better to play with relatives because "one doesn't quarrel so much." The boys in general liked to play in the schoolyard "because one meets one's friends from outside the neighborhood there." One brown-skinned imp in ragged hand-me-downs said that "Lots of us play near the school because our parents cannot see us and call us to work." Both boys and girls said that the teachers showed them many games which they still played in the summer.

The children of Dragalevtsy seldom acted out stories or dramas which they had seen portrayed in books or in a *vecherinka* (entertainment). The boys did almost no tree-climbing because there were few trees in the village large enough. All the climbing that was done was "for work," to get nuts or fruit. Games with balls or marbles were brought to the village by students going daily into Sofia to one of the higher schools. The group games of a formal nature requiring ten or fifteen children were learned in the village school and were usually played in the schoolyard. Some of the most popular children's games were the following:

Na svinkya (Playing swine). Several boys hit a wooden ball into holes with the use of clubs knotted at the end. There was a boy guarding each hole and one in the center. The idea was to get the ball into the hole. This was a peasant form of golf and was one of the oldest games played by Bulgarian villagers. It was the special favorite of boys who were keeping the animals in the pastures.

Sus kukla (With a doll). Some people estimated that one out of every six little girls had a doll, while others maintained that the number was nearer three out of six. There were no statistics on this subject, but playing with dolls was uncommon enough to make it a source of great joy to children who did so. Some of the dolls were very crude and ugly, though many parents were buying western dolls in the market to bring home.

Na Tsiganeta (Playing gypsies). Since every boy caring for animals carried a stick, it was natural that a game using this stick originated. The game called for the contestants to bounce their stick from one end to the other in rapid succession, much as one would "skip" a rock on the surface of water. The stick might jump five or

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857 524 six times before falling motionless. The least skillful contestant received a beating from the others.

Na machuklin (In New England called "Peggy"). Consisted chiefly of tapping the end of a small stick so that it would rise into the air to be hit again before it fell to the ground.

Na Kokumish. This was a form of tag played by children sitting around in a circle.

Na gonenitsa (Form of running tag). The one to be "it" *(gogan)* was chosen by "counting out" with the use of the following poem, which corresponded to "eeny, meeny, miney, mo":

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Ala bala nitsa,
Turska panitsa,
E, gidi Dancho,
Nash kapitancho.

Ala bala nitsa,
A Turkish plate,
Hey, you Dancho,
Our leader.

The children when counting out spit on their fingers. The *gogan* would run and try to touch the others.

Na zhmish (Hide and seek). The one who was "it" said the following poem while the others hid:

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Dve vrabcheta
Se skaraka
Na Popovota vrata.
Pop izleza i im kazva
Ish, pish, tish, stesh, mish.

Two sparrows
Quarreled
At the Priest's gate.
The Priest came out and told them
Ish, pish, tish, stesh, mish.

After he said this he went to hunt the others. Wherever he found anyone he spit in the place where he was. The others tried to run to the homebase and spit there before he did.

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Kosharki (Sheep folds). This was a game which had been played extensively a generation ago, but its use was dying out in the village. The children would build miniature sheep folds, houses, and fences out of rocks. This game corresponded after a fashion to our building with blocks.

The outstanding characteristic of all these games was that they required little equipment and few participants. At home, the play groups were inevitably restricted to the family and nearest neighbors, often relatives. At school, children could choose relatives and other children in the same grade. Play groups in the fields were formed on the basis of family ownership of land and common pasture. These latter groups often gathered in the village and went to the fields together, the youngsters carrying loaves of bread, baked peppers, and fresh tomatoes. Even in play, the family was important, for every type of play group almost automatically included relatives. As was previously pointed out, there was less quarreling among the children who were related. I often heard: "You shouldn't hit him; he's your relative."

The new types of play were still limited. The radio, comic papers, and movies were almost unknown to the village child, just as they were to the average adult. Only twenty-five newspapers reached the village daily, and these had few comic strips. Magazines and books were a rarity. Sofia bookshops had some exquisite children's books, but I never saw one in the village. Sometimes when I came into a village home on a winter evening, I would see an unforgettable picture. Near the fire the father sat quietly, elbows on knees, the mother was spinning near the one dim electric bulb, and in the center, crouched at the low table, a boy, nine or ten years old, was laboriously reading some fragment of a periodical to his parents. Their pride and pleasure was unspoken but obvious.

There was one radio in the village, and the children were of course conscious of it as it blared incessantly in Renaissance Square, but it was not a part of their life, any more than the movies or trains. Only 45 per cent of the total population, including babies, had ever attended a movie, and less than 40 per cent had ever been on a train.